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for

THE FOREST

AN IDYLL OF THE WOODS

EDWINE NOYE

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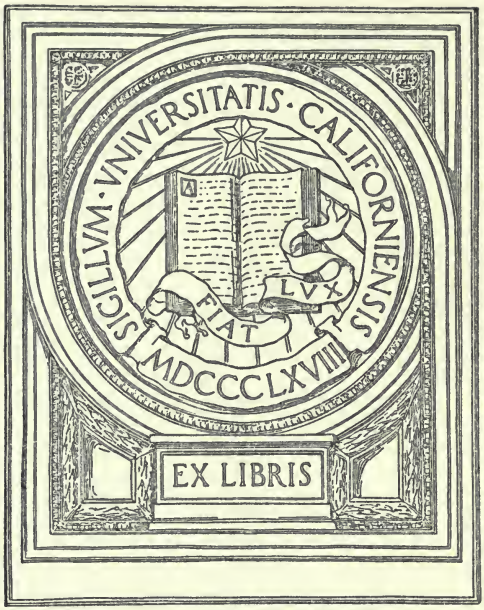
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Mrs. C. S. Prescott.
With love
Auntie Emily
Oct-29th
1912

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THE FOREST

AN IDYLL OF THE WOODS

BY

EDWINE NOYE

OTTO ULBRICH CO.
BUFFALO, N. Y.
1912

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

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for

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THE FOREST

An Idyll of the Woods

Characters

Sylvan	The Dryad
Sylvia	The Gale
The Child	Pan

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Scene I

A stormy summer's evening in the depths of the forest. The pale yellow wash of the sunset glimmers through the trees and the wind sighs mournfully amid the murmuring needles of the gigantic pines. Enter Sylvan dragging a load of fagots.

Sylvan

I must be hastening on.—The western sun
Has nearly sunk behind yon distant pine,
And Sylvia will be harkening for my step,
And set the flick'ring taper toward the path.
This wind will do much damage; I do fear
That all the luscious purple fruit which swings,
Near ripe, upon the plum-tree by the door
Will be destroyed and crushed by this mad gale,

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And we shall lose the coppers which it brings.
Ah, what a wind! 'T will blow the world away!

He trips and falls.

Perdition take the storm!

Enter the Dryad pursued by the Gale.

DRYAD

My sisters! Aid!
Lend me thy friendly branches, or the Gale
Will tear me from my home's close-sheltering bark
And toss me helpless in his mighty arms.
Oh, why did I desert my friendly leaves?

GALE (*whispering*)

Belovèd, daughter of the woodlands, stay!
I 'll cherish thee, and shield thy lissome form
From all alarms of axe or storm or flood.
I 'll plant the loveliest flowers about thy roots,
And gently sway thy branches all day long
For but one kiss from those red lips, my sweet.

DRYAD (*escaping*)

Away, away, rude follower! Well I know

How far thy honeyed words will carry deeds!
Away, wild spirit—cease thy vain pursuit
Or I will call on our great Father, Pan!

GALE

And Pan will laugh—for that 's the way of Pan.
But I will have thee, sweet enchantress.—Ah!

He almost catches her, but she eludes him. Suddenly seeing Sylvan, she pauses long enough for the Gale to touch her draperies.

DRYAD

(*With a wild cry, flinging herself at Sylvan's feet*)

Thou Mortal! I appeal to thee for aid.
Save me from this pursuer, and by Pan
I 'll bless th' entire remainder of thy days.
Protect me and I 'll grant thee what thou wilt!

SYLVAN (*bewildered*)

Whence came this lovely apparition?—Nay,
Maiden, with my last breath I would protect
Such beauty, but I see nor man nor beast
Who would molest thee.

DRYAD

'T is the wind, the wind!

SYLVAN

If 't is the storm which frights thee, have no fear.
I 'll wrap thee in my warm encircling cloak,
And guide thee to our humble cottage hearth
Where thou may'st rest and eat. It is indeed
A wild night for a maiden all alone.
How cam'st thou here?

DRYAD

The wind, the cruel wind!

SYLVAN

Canst thou not answer?—Well, we 'll wait awhile
Till thou shalt gain some nourishment and rest.
Wilt come? Nay, tremble not,—there 's naught to fear.

They start off, the Dryad clinging to him.

GALE (*threatening*)

By the cleft hooves of Pan! Thou hast transgressed
The laws of the Immortals! Thou hast shown
Thy form to human eyes. Thou know'st thy fate.
Win thou his love before Midsummer's Eve,
Or die an endless death; for we who live,
Yet have no souls, are nothingness beyond.
E'en thus do the Immortals punish those
Who scorn their sacred laws. Farewell, rash nymph!

Exit the Gale in a furious gust of wind.

DRYAD

I would not die—I cry thee mercy.—Ah!

She falls into Sylvan's arms, who leads her away along the path through the trees. Exeunt.

(*Curtain.*)

Scene II

Inside the cottage. Candle-light. Sylvia *stands at the open door straining her eyes into the night, a taper in her hand and the Child clinging to her skirts.*

Sylvia (*anxiously*)

The night grows wild, and he is very late.
If aught mischance should harm him I should die.

The Child whimpers.

There, chick, there 's naught to fear,
The Father 'll come e'er long and toss thee high,
Or tell thee faery tales till time for bed.
There, weep not,—fear not, darling. He will come,
And Mother 'll hold thee close and listen too,
That we may hear his first approaching steps

Amid the storm. Hark! Now I seem to hear
The branches cracking as he comes along
The woodland path.—Kind heaven to keep
him safe!
Sylvan, dear husband, haste! The broth
grows cold,
And thine own child is waiting for thy kiss—
The door opens. Enter Sylvan and the Dryad veiled.
Who is the shrouded stranger? Whence
comes she?

SYLVAN

Dear Sylvia, 't is a maiden whom I found
Alone and weeping in the forest shades,
Who craved protection from some unseen
power.
Give her some food and let her rest awhile,
And show her hospitality for me.

SYLVIA

A maiden?—and alone within the wood?
No wonder thou didst weep for very fear.
The shades of night are deep and terrify

With subtle wav'ring shadows which suggest
Those unseen spirits that would harm mankind.
Let me remove thy veil, and rest, and eat.
Heaven, what beauty! Sylvan, look how fair!

She glances at Sylvan who stands spellbound at sight of the Dryad.

DRYAD

I thank thee, gracious Mortal, though I fear
No forest shades nor spirits, but the wind,
From whom I claimed protection of thy man.
Is the child thine?

SYLVIA

The child? Indeed—but yes.
Come, pretty chick, take out the naughty thumb
From thy sweet rosebud mouth, and say good e'en
Unto the gentle lady. Speak thy best.

The Child greets her shyly.

Ah, that was sweetly done.
He is but five come Candlemas again.

DRYAD

Come, man-child, I would whisper in thine ear.
Wouldst like to frolic with the merry winds
And chase the butterfly and thistledown?
I 'll give thee blossoms fair, and honey sweet,
And speckled frogs to play with all day long.
Wilt have me for thy friend? Speak, little fawn.

The Child flings its arms about the Dryad.

SYLVIA

See how the child takes to her—she is good
Or he would cry and whimper, or escape.
Come darling; 't is thy bedtime. Say good e'en.
And kiss thy Father. We must haste to sleep
Or all the forest elves will haunt thy dreams.

Exit Sylvia and the Child. Soft lullaby from inner room. The Dryad stands motionless. Sylvan comes forward.

SYLVAN

Art hungered, maiden? Wilt thou not partake
Of that poor fare which we may offer thee?

DRYAD

I thank thee, Mortal, thou art fairly kind.

She seats herself at the board and touches the food. Suddenly she raises her eyes to Sylvan who is watching her. He is held tranced by her gaze. A long pause. . . . The lullaby ceases and Sylvia enters briskly and hospitably.

SYLVIA

The babe's asleep. Hast thou refreshed thyself?

(*To Sylvan*)

How sweet it is to know thee safe at home!
Hast thou forgotten nothing, Sylvan—no?

He recovers himself with a start and kisses her absently.

Now I am happy. How I love thee, dear!

DRYAD (*aside*)

Love? What is love? 'T is what the threatening Gale
Said I must win from Sylvan.
(*To Sylvia*)
What is love?

SYLVIA (*blushing*)

Pardon, fair maid—I fear me I forget
The usages of hospitality;
But it had grown so late, the night so dark,
And I was very glad when he came home.

DRYAD

But what is love? I do not understand.

SYLVIA

Not understand? Why, 't is that tender thing
Which I do feel for Sylvan. This is love.

DRYAD

She cannot tell me. I must ask without.

SYLVIA

Stranger, art not fatigued? In this small room
Standeth a fair broad bed to give thee rest.
All ours is thine, and thou may'st gain to-night
Fresh strength against the morrow. Rest thee well.

DRYAD

May Pan bring peace upon thy hut and thee.

Exit Dryad through inner door. Sylvan follows her with his eyes until the door closes, then stands entranced and motionless.

SYLVAN

A slim green vision—cool, deep, sunlit eyes
All mystery.—I wish—they make me see
The moss-hung forest glades which subtly hint
Of hidden presences.—I wish—

Sylvia, suddenly becoming conscious of his spellbound stillness, runs to his side in alarm.

SYLVIA

Sylvan, dear husband! What has struck thee so?
Dost thou not know me? Can'st not hear my words?
(*Shaking him by the arm.*)
Ah, Sylvan—how canst thou affright me thus?
Awake! dear one, awake! Sylvan, awake!

Slowly he comes out of his trance, and as his eyes rest on Sylvia he draws a long breath of relief and takes her into his arms.

SYLVAN

Dear Sylvia, 't was as a fair sweet dream,
But nothing to the love within thine eyes.
Come darling, all is right again. Now haste
And get thee to thy rest: thy heavy eyes
Proclaim the tender watching for thy mate.
Away, dear—sleep thou well.

Exit Sylvia.

My love for her
Is true as tempered steel—and yet, and yet—
Those gold-green eyes—

(*Curtain.*)

Scene III

Dawn in the forest. Before the altar of Pan; a white birch is reflected in the dim pool at its base. Enter the Dryad.

Dryad

When first the sky was streaked with rosy light,
I slipped from out the little mortal cage
To dance upon the outspread wings of dawn.
Ah, how the winds did buffet!—I forget,
'T is three days to Midsummer: I must win
This thing called love before that hour—or die.
(*Caressing the birch.*)
Dear branches, shelt'ring bark, how sweet it is
To feel the Springtime leap in every shoot!
I would not perish yet; I fain would see
Another spring—yet still I know not love.
I 'll ask the Wood if it can tell me aught

Of this strange thing. Great Oak-tree, thou
art old
In winters and in wisdom. What is love?

OAK

It comes to mortals only; 't is the thing
Which brings two human beings, hand in hand,
To carve my trunk with letters intertwined.
I know no more of love.

DRYAD

'T is not enough.
Convolvulus! lost gleam of pale moonlight,
Caught i' the shadows by the dawn's first beam,
Canst tell me aught of love?

CONVOLVULUS

It is the thing,
Which, when a mortal, heavy-browed and sad,
In loitering through the forest sees my bloom,
Brings him to write an ode on his own death,
And sing of pale white blossoms o'er his grave,
That all the world may read. Is this not love?

DRYAD

Nay, it is more than these. Sweet crimson
rose,

Dreaming upon thy thorn-decked briery stem,
Thou 'st been a symbol to all human-kind
Of this same feeling; tell me,—what is love?

ROSE

'T is melody; that weird, sweet harmony
Which thrills and quivers in the bulbul's throat
Beneath the silver moon. 'T is sad and strange
And wondrous sweet—half tears, and half delight.

DRYAD

I do not understand. Thy words are fair
But wake no echoes in my slumbering brain.
I know the moonlight, and the bulbul's song,
Yet know not love. Ye zephyrs, stirring soft
The silent air, know ye the thing called love?

CHORUS OF ZEPHYRS (*a faint, soft breath*)

We know it not—know not—know not—know not.

DRYAD

And thou, pale stately lily, know'st thou love?

LILY

Nay, passionless I sway—I know it not.

DRYAD

Gay butterflies, who dance the livelong day,
Pause in thy airy whirls and tell me true,
Know ye of love?

CHORUS OF BUTTERFLIES, (*far and faint*)

Nay, we know not—know not—

DRYAD

Sweet birdlings, thrilling dawn with crystal sound,
Sing me thy answer! Tell me—what is love?

CHORUS OF BIRDS

It is the twitter of the mother bird,
Sitting upon the five brown-speckled eggs,
Hid in the little nest amid the leaves.
This, and the glory of the coming dawn
Which fires the pallid heavens!

DRYAD

What have I
To do with twittering birdmates and with nests?

They, and the rising sun? The forest life
Is ignorant of love! What shall I do?
The day draws near when I must pay the gods
And still I know not love. What shall I do?

A universal murmur breathes through the forest.

Ask Pan—ask Pan—ask Pan—the Father Pan.

DRYAD

(*Turning to the altar with uplifted hands.*)

Great Pan, All-Father Pan of woodland things,
Unriddle me my quest, and lend thine aid,
Reveal to me this thing which men call love!

PAN (*a voice*)

Fair Dryad, daughter of the sun-flecked wood,
Attend. The thing called love comes with a soul;
Ye elemental beings know it not.
It is a great, sweet feeling in the heart
Warming to one man only, or one maid;
Yearning to do for them,—if need, to die.

Willing to leave all home and kindred ties
And follow this one soul throughout the world,
To smooth its path and suffer all its pain.
On this strange human thing is set a seal,
The meeting of the lips they call a kiss.
If thou canst gain, soulless, this mortal's love,
With his first kiss thou shalt receive a soul,
And learn to love with force outreaching his.
For, when a creature of the woodland things
Has, struggling, gained a soul, that soul shall be
More pure and strong and brave than humankind
May ever reach. But thou must bear great pain,
And keep his love all thine,—for with its wane
Comes death.

DRYAD

I thank thee, Pan, and I will gain
From Sylvan this strange feeling, or—I die.

Sylvan slowly approaches and the Dryad conceals herself in her tree.

SYLVAN

How far I 've wandered on! . . . I 'll ask of
Pan
The cause of this strange restlessness of heart,
Which sets me roaming o'er the fields and hills,
Or lying hours long upon the moss,
My body still, my spirit tranced by strange
Soft stirrings in the draperies of the trees.
Far-worshipped Pan, what spell doth hold me
thrall?

A pause . . . silence save for low eldritch laughter.

He answers not. . . . Have I displeased the
god?
I will lie down and rest—I 'm strangely
tired. . . .
How purpled is the ground with violets,
Like wine from out the goblet of the gods.
Wood-spirits, let me slumber in thine arms.

He stretches out beneath the oak with closed eyes. . . . The Dryad steps forth and eyes him furtively, then crouches at his head and presses her fingers gently on his eyelids.

DRYAD

Nay, open not thine eyes, but hear my voice.

SYLVAN

What silver tones! Methinks that I do dream.

DRYAD

Wouldst come with me and rest deep i' the wood,
On emerald moss 'mid cool green shadows lie;
With falling water murmuring to thine ear
And all sweet fragrance stealing through thy sense?

SYLVAN

I will not wake lest I should break the dream.

DRYAD

I 'll gain for thee the thrush's liquid note
To lull thee to soft slumber. Thou shalt have
The variant zephyrs for thy slaves, to fan
Thy forehead and obey thy slightest will.
Wilt follow me?

SYLVAN

What wonder-world is this?
I dare not wake.

DRYAD

For thee I 'll search and find
All precious gems of earth. I 'll clasp thy brows
With emerald and pearl and chrysolite.
When thou wouldst live, we 'll stride the panting deer,
Or mount, all swan-like, in the sweeping arms
Of my dear friends the clouds. When thou wouldst eat,
The fruit of all the world is at thy hand.
When thou wouldst sleep, I 'll ring thee with white arms,
And smooth thy soft hair—thus.

She touches his hair.

SYLVAN

The fleeting touch
Of moonlight and of dew . . . my eyes are closed. . . .

DRYAD

When thou wouldst see fair sights unknown
to man,
My sisters and the water-nymphs shall dance
In mazy circles to delight the eye.
Dear mortal, look at me.

SYLVAN

I dare not look;
The dream might waver, or be lost, and I
Should live in yearning mem'ry all my days.

DRYAD

Open thine eyes, dear mortal, and thy dream
Shall stay.

SYLVAN

I 'll look or perish. Heaven, what eyes!
All gold glints like the sunlight through the
leaves!
My dream is safe.

DRYAD

Sylvan, wilt follow me?

SYLVAN

Aye, so will I.

DRYAD

Wilt stride the fleecy clouds?
Or ride the deer, or leap the waterfall?
Or seek the treasure in the mountain caves?
Or float upon an endless sapphire sea?

SYLVAN

I would but gaze into those sunlit eyes
Where lies the mystery of hidden things.

DRYAD

Then thou shalt see the glamour of the wood,
And watch the airy swirls of woodland dance
By spirits filmy as the night moth's wing.

She rises and invokes the wood and water-nymphs who enter silently as she speaks.

Dear sisters of the oak, and ash, and thorn,
Aid me I pray but to delight his eye
And lose his 'wildered brain in mazy round.
Dark naiad of the silent mountain lake,

I bid thee come,—a sister asks thine aid!
White waterfall, come hither! Lend the dance
Thine airy lightness and thy rainbow mists.
And thou, O favored sprite of ancient Pan,
Who guards his sacred fountain, bring, I pray,
Thy silver tread to lead the mystic rite!

Low music: dance of the nymphs. They are veiled and the step is intricate, swaying, and very graceful. As they form and reform in misty dissolving figures, beyond them is caught the vague outline of a shaggy, vine-crowned form seated upon a rock and playing upon some rude woodland pipes. As the music dies away the nymphs disappear silently through the trees, and the figure of the god also vanishes.

DRYAD (*bending over Sylvan*)

Wilt love me?

SYLVAN

Aye.

DRYAD

Wilt follow through the wood
And find that paradise of which I told?

SYLVAN

Aye, so will I.

DRYAD

Dost love me?

SYLVAN

Yea.

DRYAD

Kiss me?

SYLVAN

The dream grows yet more dear . . . to touch
those lips. . . .

She bends down, her hair falling about her, and he kisses her. . . . Rising slowly, the Dryad turns to the altar.

DRYAD

Great Pan, thy human soul is full of pain!

My eyes are opened to a changing world
Of right and wrong, of strangely piercing grief;
But also to a tenderness my heart
Imagined not. My Sylvan, mine, dear love!

She turns with a mortal light shining in her eyes to meet his faun-like smile.

SYLVAN

I 'll dance with thee forever in the wood!

(*Curtain.*)

Scene IV

The same—Midsummer's Eve. Throughout this scene there is continual evidence that the unseen powers of the forest are abroad. Spirits and pixies glide unobtrusively through the trees, and the pipes of Pan rise and fall in vague harmonies in the distance. Sylvia enters, dragging herself along as if exhausted, and sobbing heavily. Three small, brown, soft-footed pixies peer at her furtively, twitch her garments, and attempt to trip her.

Sylvia

The very forest bars my way. . . . I faint. . .

She falls prostrate before the altar and the pixies rush back frightened among the trees. . . . Slowly she rises to her

knees and stretches her arms toward the altar.

Great Pan, in pity, soften thou my pain!
Thou know'st that I have lost my husband's love,
The love of Sylvan, which I held more dear
Than any earthly thing. 'T was stol'n away
Between the dawn and setting of one sun
By a green spirit nurtured i' the wood;
And I am left, heart-broken. Sylvan springs
On eager foot through woodland sun and shade,
Pursuing this green spirit-thing, which flits
In misty radiance ever just beyond
His outstretched fingers. Then, when he is spent,
And throws himself exhausted on the moss,
When, as of old, his thoughts might turn to me,
The Dryad bends above him, murmuring
False promises and whispers in his ear;
And straightway he forgets his humble cote
And Sylvia weeping lonely 'neath its roof,

And springs away, light-foot, to catch this sprite,
This myth of woven moonlight and desire.
I followed for a day, footsore and faint,
Calling aloud his name and weeping sore;
Hoping that he might see my tears, perchance
Relent and turn to me. But nay, he still
Roams through the forest, careless of my voice.
And so I cry thine aid in my sore need.

PAN

Fair Sylvia, steel thy heart; his love is gone
Because his soul is lost. 'T was lost through sin.
His life was fairly quiet, and the days
Seemed gray and dull beside the woodland gold
To which the Dryad beckoned in her spell.
He left the narrow foot-path which he knew
Led to the hut and hearth of every day,
And thought to cross the woodland by a path
Of bluebells, springing on from flower to flower,

Perchance to find, too late, the precipice
Which barred his flowery road. Alas, he fell:
For when the Dryad lured him on this way,
He left thy tender care and homely love
And yielded,—and in yielding, lost his soul.
There is no aid.

SYLVIA

Kind Heaven! There is no aid!
And I must hug this misery to my breast?
For each remembered touch of his, a spear
To pierce my tortured heart until it break!
There is no aid. . . . Sylvan is lost to me. . . .
I 'll haste to die, and wait for his sweet soul
In that fair Paradise in which we trust.

PAN

There is no Paradise for him. For he
Has lost his heritage of after-life.
When this green nymph, this creature of the wood,
Has worn his earthly body quite away
With fierce, wild sports of wind and storm and rain,

He will not die, but slowly fade away.
He hath no spirit left for Hell or Heaven.
His soul is lost.

SYLVIA

Is lost? Then when he dies
He may not taste of immortality?
He may not see our Great White Father, Christ,
Enthroned upon his cloud-encircled height?
Then he must die for all eternity?

PAN

His soul is lost . . . and save some piteous one
Should die this very evening for his sake,
He may not taste of immortality.

SYLVIA

Some piteous one. . . . Ah, what would I not give
To prove the sureness of my love for him!

PAN

If thou shouldst die this night for Sylvan's sake
Thou losest, then, thine own eternity.

SYLVIA

To go to endless night. Yea, so would I
For Sylvan's sake. But Pan, a boon I crave:
Grant that he weep above my soulless tomb,
And know my sacrifice. I would not think
Of Sylvan dancing, elfish, as I die.

PAN

His soul shall enter as thine own departs;
His future life shall be thine elegy,
And he shall grieve forever for his wife—
If thou wouldst have it so.

SYLVIA

Yea, so would I.
If he will grieve, then gladly shall I take
The long dark pathway through the gates of Death.
To die for him . . . What more could mortal ask?
I go. . . .

Exit Sylvia. Enter Sylvan pursuing the Dryad. She flits between the trees, then suddenly turns and rushes into his arms.

DRYAD

Sylvan, dear mortal, thou hast made
The dryad foreign to her nature. Thou
Hast given the woodland thing a throbbing pain
Which leaps within her breast. If I might see
But faint reflection in thy mortal eyes
Of this great light which burns my heart away,
Then I should find a deeper, truer joy,
Far greater than that careless gaiety
Which I once felt before I gained a soul,—
The lawless joy of nature. I have grown
To feel I am all human. Dost love me?

SYLVAN

Yea, verily, I fain would kiss thy lips.
But why waste this clear sunshine in such talk?
Come, let us to those wild sweet forest games
Which thou hast taught me. I will run and leap
And catch the flickering sunbeam for thy tread.
Ah, what a thing it is to play and dance
And sing the joy of nature all the day!

DRYAD

Belovèd, tarry,—I would seek thine eyes
For a faint flicker of that love which shone
On me in that one moment when thou saw'st
Deep to my new-found heart in our first kiss.
I love thee, Sylvan.

SYLVAN

Yea, I have heard too oft
Those same quaint words, yet understand I not
What thing it is thou meanest. Let us dance
Beside the brooklet, or go find the flowers
Of palest turquoise growing on its banks.
Enough of this sad talk! Let us away!

DRYAD

I find this thing which mortals call a soul
A strange possession. The red rose spoke true. . . .
"Half tears and half delight" . . . and more than these,
A racking joy which flames within the breast,
A tenderness which hints of angel wings.
For this one human being I would give

My new-born hope of immortality
To make his life more bright. My heart has changed
From that wild sprite which roamed the woods and hills,
And lured mankind to madness or to death.
Why must it be that with this new-born love
I find this new-born pain?

With one hand on the birch tree, she leans over the still pool . . . the Pan-pipes swell softly on the breeze. . . . Sylvan has been playing games with the little pixies during this speech. Now he leaps forward toward the Dryad, his hands full of blossoms which he offers on his knee.

SYLVAN

Come, goddess of the woods, away with me!
See, I have brought thee offerings from thy realm:
This tender pale blue flower is called by men
Forget-me-not . . . what strange, sad words they are!

I cannot understand . . . and yet, I hear
A far faint echo crying them again . . .
Forget-me-not. . . .

Enter the Child who runs to him and clasps him about the knees.

CHILD

Oh Father, come with me!
The mother lies upon the ground and moans
Thy name, and will not stir nor speak a word
To all my questioning. I fear me! Come!

DRYAD

No! . . . no! . . .

SYLVAN

What is this creature? In my brain
Is born a faint remembrance of the thing.
I 'll go.

DRYAD

No, no! . . . ah, no! . . .

She clings trembling to his arm. He shakes her from him carelessly.

SYLVAN

But yes . . . away!
It may be some new game I know not of.
Come, quaint small creature, lead me to thy home.
Art thou a pixie?

He goes off leading the Child.

DRYAD

Pan, the very air
Is filled with heavy menacing of harm
Like distant thunder. Is he lost to me?
The child did seem a harbinger of grief.

A weird echo steals through the forest.

Lost . . . lost . . . lost!

Enter Sylvan staggering under the weight of Sylvia.

DRYAD

Ah, Sylvan, my beloved. . . .

He pays no heed to her, but lays Sylvia down under the oak.

SYLVAN

This woman brings

A faint, vague stirring deep within my heart.
I do not know . . . I cannot think . . .
but . . .

Sylvia opens her eyes and stretches out her arms.

SYLVIA

Sylvan, . . . I die for thee. . . . Bend down
thy head,
I would but kiss thee once . . .

DRYAD

No, no! . . . ah, no! . . .

Bewildered, Sylvan slowly leans to kiss Sylvia; as he does so, a change comes over his face.

SYLVAN

My Sylvia, my Sylvia, at last!
Ah, darling, desert-like have been the days
Since last I saw thee! But what ails thee,
dear?
What dost thou here, so pale?—thy hand is
cold!

Ah, gods! My Sylvia! . . . Is this Black Death
Who bends above us calling thee by name?
Speak to me, Sylvia! Speak—my love—my heart!

SYLVIA (*faintly*)

My Sylvan, mine once more! Ah, hold me close!
Spare me thy tears, for thou dost gain a soul.
Thou 'lt grieve for me?

SYLVAN

The gods cannot permit
Such horror! All the world, which once I thought
So fair, is black and dead. How did I e'er
See beauty in the forest whilst thou pined?
All-powerful gods, I cry thee . . . give her aid!
Restore her life! . . . Belovèd, speak to me,
My broken heart dies with thee. . . . Sylvia, speak!

DRYAD (*softly*)

Great Pan, I would not have him suffer thus!

What can I do to ease his grief-struck heart?
He looks at her as I have looked at him.
Ah, would I were the woman! . . . I would
speak.

PAN

All love is sacrifice, and Sylvia dies
Because she loves him, giving him her soul
That he may gain immortal life beyond.

DRYAD

I 'd give my life—I 'd give my very soul
To see this mortal glad; for with my soul
I gained a purer, truer, love than hers.
Pan, give to me this mortal's priceless boon.
Let me lay down the life which I have won!

PAN

Not death alone suffices; wouldst thou give
Thy new-born hope of immortality
To see him happy—with another maid?

DRYAD

If life with this one woman make him glad . . .
If I can clear those heart-wrung eyes of
his . . .

I will. . . . Ah, cruel soul! . . . My love is far
Above the love of mortals. He shall live
And love the woman. . . . I will melt away
To utter nothingness for his dear sake.
Wood-Father, show the way!

PAN

Give him the axe
And bid him strike the white birch to the heart.

DRYAD

And I shall be . . . but dust and wind . . . and yet,
My love hath gained me death . . . 't was worth the price.

SYLVAN

(*Still bending over Sylvia, heedless of the Dryad*)

Her eyes are open! Sylvia, it is I!

SYLVIA (*faintly*)

Sylvan, thy lips . . .

Her eyes close. The Dryad steals forward and touches Sylvan on the shoulder imploringly.

DRYAD

. . . If thou wouldst save her life . . .

SYLVAN (*shaking her off roughly*)

Away, false spirit! I would be alone
With my beloved.

DRYAD

There is yet time to save . . .
It is the voice of Pan . . . the word is true! . . .

SYLVAN

Then, trait'rous spirit, haste! I prithee, speak!

DRYAD

Take thou this glistening steel and haste to strike
The stem of yonder birch until it fall.
Thy Sylvia shall live. Farewell, my love,
I give thee back thy heritage of tears;
Farewell, my soul!

She kisses him gently on the forehead. He seizes the axe and strikes the birch until it totters. There is a faint cry and as the tree falls the Dryad falls with it, her draperies mingling with the foliage and concealing her.

. . . . . .

Sylvia sighs and sits up, bewildered.

SYLVIA

Sylvan, methought I dreamed
Of following thee through bracken, mud, and thorn,
And calling, all unanswered on thy name;
My heart was torn with longing. . . . Have I slept?

SYLVAN

Methought I felt a touch upon my brow
Of fragrant coolness; then I seemed to hear
A thin, clear music echoing through my brain
Like woodland piping. . . . It must be the wind.
Arise, dear Sylvia, see! The starry night

Hath lipped the upheld cup of rosy dawn,
And all the liquid golden wine of morn
Is overturned upon a breathless world!
Come, darling, we must hasten. The green path
Which leadeth to our cottage is beset
With violets, and shot with emerald flame.
How beautiful is all the world to-day!

SYLVIA

Yes, I am strangely happy. All the earth
Is wondrous fair! How clearly sing the birds!

Exeunt.

A silence . . . the pan-pipes swell on the breeze and die away. The three little pixies steal out to peer furtively at the fallen Dryad, but scurry back timorously at a slight sound. . . . The cock crows.

(*Curtain.*)

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